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## Perspectives on Central America

Issue #2

April - June 1987

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**DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE**

**PERSPECTIVES ON CENTRAL AMERICA**

**ISSUE #2**

**APRIL - JUNE 1987**

This memorandum was prepared by the Central America and Nicaragua Branches, Office of African and Latin American Analysis, and contains information available as of 21 July 1987. It has been coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Middle America-Caribbean Division, ALA [REDACTED]

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PERSPECTIVES ON CENTRAL AMERICA #2

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Part I: Trends Over the Past QuarterNICARAGUAKey Developments

Steady improvement of the rebel's logistic system, establishment of a mobile forward command post in the Rio Bocay Valley, and the presence of large numbers of guerrillas inside Nicaragua contributed to significantly increased fighting during the last three months. Rebel attacks on economic targets--bridges, electrical pylons, and agricultural cooperatives--have become widespread, and the insurgents have begun to mass in larger numbers to hit harder military targets. [REDACTED]

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Despite the onset of the rainy season, resupply flights averaged more than one per day over the quarter, according to knowledgeable sources, keeping the roughly 14,000 insurgents inside Nicaragua well supplied with weapons, explosives, and quartermaster materiel. The rebels also took steps to improve their overland, riverine, and maritime logistics systems. [REDACTED]

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US-supplied Redeye surface-to-air missiles have allowed the rebels to counter Managua's extensive helicopter fleet more effectively. The downing of three government helicopters--including an MI-25 gunship--with the new missiles forced the regime to ground its helicopter fleet temporarily during early June while Air Force tacticians devised countermeasures to reduce the threat posed by the Redeye. [REDACTED]

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The insurgents also made political gains by restructuring their umbrella political group and trying to unify all Indian factions. The new rebel organization--the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance--adds representatives from the center-left Southern Opposition Bloc to the constituent groups of the previous umbrella organization. Its new seven-member directorate includes Bloc leader Alfredo Cesar and recently self-exiled moderate Azucena Ferrey, whose wide contacts with political moderates in Western Europe and Latin America may help to improve the insurgents' image internationally. A week-long assembly of Atlantic Coast Indians in June, the first major Indian gathering since 1981, was a key first step toward unifying the disparate Indian groups and bringing them into the mainstream of the insurgency. [REDACTED]

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The Sandinistas are coordinating multi-unit operations better than in the past and have continued to react aggressively to the large rebel presence. The government offensive against the rebel supply and infiltration route in the Rio Bocay Valley in May, while failing to entice the insurgents into pitched battles they could not win, demonstrated the regime's ability to conduct large-scale airmobile operations. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

Internally, the government has backed away from its hard line in several areas of economic policy, lifting many import restrictions and suspending raids on illegal markets, for example. The new moves--in part a response to rising public disenchantment with regime economic policies and possibly Soviet pressure--could help ease shortages of consumer goods over the short term but are unlikely to undercut informal commerce substantially. Public claims by Nicaraguan officials that the USSR has cut oil deliveries are intended, in our view, to induce Mexico and Venezuela to renew concessionary oil shipments and other Latin American countries to increase their economic aid to Nicaragua. [REDACTED]

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The regime continued to clamp down on dissidents. Sandinista security forces arrested five local opposition leaders following an antigovernment protest in mid-June in Boaco Department. The regime also intensified its propaganda attacks against the Catholic Church, charging that Cardinal Obando y Bravo had received CIA funds. To help quash potential support for the insurgents, some 5,000 peasants were recently moved into resettlement camps away from the war zones--bringing our estimate of the total of forcibly displaced persons to more than 250,000. [REDACTED]

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#### Issues to Watch

The insurgents undoubtedly will continue targetting Sandinista helicopters to disrupt government air operations. Key developments to watch for will be the loss of scarce, combat-experienced flight crews and whether rebel interdictions of the road network further strain the capabilities of the helicopter fleet to ferry supplies to units in the field. [REDACTED]

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As rebel leaders jockey for influence and begin to discuss key issues, such as the formation of a national army, ideological and personal differences are likely to resurface, hindering insurgent unity. Moreover, cooperation between the Indians and the guerrilla umbrella organization probably will remain uncertain, and significant Indian guerrilla activity is unlikely in the next few months. [REDACTED]

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In the coming months, the rebels--as well as the Sandinistas--will be carefully assessing Washington's attitude toward funding for the insurgency. Rebel uncertainties about funding could lead them to scale back combat activity and stockpile weapons and ammunition. Conversely, signs that support for renewed funds is growing would give a psychological boost to the guerrillas. [REDACTED]

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## Continuing Military Activity



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EL SALVADORKey Developments

During the past quarter, the rebels largely focused on small-scale attacks, ambushes, and sabotage. Their single attempt to score a spectacular success--against an Army headquarters at Gotera on 1 May--failed. The guerrillas apparently had little time to plan and coordinate the attack, and government forces probably were more vigilant than usual because of their embarrassing losses at El Paraiso on 31 March. [REDACTED]

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The government deployed virtually all its forces in "Operation Monterrosa," a nationwide offensive that began in May and is scheduled to end in July. Initial losses by the guerrillas were high, [REDACTED] but their casualties declined as they dispersed and maneuvered to avoid direct clashes. Government deaths have been few, but guerrilla landmines have wounded more than 200 soldiers. [REDACTED]

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In late May, the guerrillas unveiled an 18-point plan to "humanize" the war and pave the way for negotiations. They offered to stop mine warfare and attacks on economic targets if the government would halt its use of airpower and artillery. Duarte immediately rejected the proposal, in part because acceptance would have increased tensions with the military, which reportedly is skeptical the insurgents would honor any agreement. [REDACTED]

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In his State of the Union address on 1 June, Duarte called for a number of modest economic reforms and appealed to the guerrillas to disarm and join the democratic political process. To soften his rejection of their proposal, he also announced the unconditional release of 98 wounded insurgents being held in government custody. [REDACTED]

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The left's efforts to organize political activity in urban areas produced mixed results. Violence at antigovernment demonstrations increased, but attendance fell off and leftist-orchestrated labor strikes failed to attract much support. [REDACTED]

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Issues to Watch

The guerrillas may attempt to mount a high-profile attack on a major military facility, such as the Ilopango Airbase, after "Operation Monterrosa" ends in July. [REDACTED]

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Terrorism and sabotage may increase in urban areas. [REDACTED]

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**Government and Guerrilla Activity, April-June 1987**



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HONDURASKey Developments

Tegucigalpa began repatriating Nicaraguan Indians in April in accordance with an agreement reached with Sandinista officials in March, according to the US Embassy. The accord has enabled Honduras to reduce the presence of unwanted refugees while giving the Nicaraguan government an opportunity to enhance its image at home and abroad. [ ]

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Soviet and Honduran officials met in Tegucigalpa in mid-May to discuss increased trade ties, according to the US Embassy. In addition, the Honduran Foreign Minister reportedly instructed his new Ambassador to the UN to accept a Soviet invitation to open a private communications channel. Honduras probably is willing to entertain limited contacts with USSR because of doubts about the US commitment. [ ]

Working in tandem with Salvadoran forces since late May, elements of two Honduran battalions provided blocking forces and intensified patrolling along the border in a crackdown on Salvadoran guerrilla activity, according to the [ ] Tegucigalpa's cooperation reflects heightened concern about the repeated spillover of the Salvadoran insurgency into its territory. [ ]

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The Honduran Congress passed a resolution in June criticizing US demands that Tegucigalpa indemnify a US citizen for property expropriated in 1982 to build a Honduran military base. [ ]

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Honduran government and military officials expressed satisfaction that agreement was reached on the sale of US F-5E fighters to Tegucigalpa, according to the US Embassy. [ ]

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Issues to Watch

Honduras will be carefully monitoring the military performance of anti-Sandinista guerrillas in Nicaragua and the prospects that Washington will renew funds for the insurgents. Tegucigalpa is likely to intensify efforts to obtain US guarantees for Honduran security. [ ]

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The delivery of the first F-5E fighters--scheduled to arrive late next quarter--should help allay some Honduran concerns about US support but almost certainly will elicit strong protests from Nicaragua. [ ]

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GUATEMALAKey Developments

Most Guatemalans viewed President Cerezo's mid-May visit to the US as a major success. His ability to secure \$5 million in military aid--a \$3 million increase over 1986--and his earlier request for [REDACTED]

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In addition, the press praised his success in securing \$56 million in new economic aid. [REDACTED]

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The simmering labor dispute that resulted in a two-week strike of public employees in early May ended in June when unions accepted the government's offer of a small increase in wages and benefits for the remainder of this year. Some unions refused to sign and continue to demand more concessions, but labor disunity and limited public support have left them with few prospects for outlasting the government. [REDACTED]

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Defense Minister Gramajo further consolidated his control of the armed forces by promoting four of his supporters to General and replacing retired Chief of Staff Caceres with General Callejas. Gramajo's swift moves to discharge several officers for publicly voicing their opposition to the promotions probably will deter further conspiracies among disgruntled junior officers, [REDACTED]

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Although the military retains the upper hand against the insurgents, the rebels scored a major psychological success with the inauguration of a clandestine radio station broadcasting weekly after-action [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] probably will have difficulty locating and destroying the station, because it lacks adequate direction-finding equipment and experience. [REDACTED]

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Issues to Watch

The Labor Ministry's efforts to oust Juan Alfaro--powerful leader of Guatemala's largest labor confederation and potential presidential candidate in 1990--by declaring his recent reelection fraudulent could make it easier for more radical labor leaders to increase their influence and move the labor movement on a more confrontational course. Although no major work stoppages have been planned for the next three months, differences over Cerezo's economic agenda--still to be announced--could result in new labor disturbances. [REDACTED]

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After denouncing the recent passage of legislation providing for a human rights ombudsman to be appointed this summer, the Mutual Support Group publicly hinted it may resort to violence in future demonstrations to pressure Cerezo to repeal the military amnesty law and punish officers for past human rights abuses. [REDACTED]

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COSTA RICAKey Developments

President Arias' four-week European visit in May garnered substantial positive publicity, some financial assistance, and rhetorical support for his Central American peace plan. Spain agreed to lend San Jose \$8 million to finish construction of a highway project and for a radio station. Madrid also promised to support Costa Rica at the next Paris Club meeting on debt restructuring. Other European countries pledged a total of nearly \$50 million in trade credits to the Costa Rican energy sector. [ ]

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Arias visited the US in mid-June to attend the Pan American Economic Leadership Conference and meet with President Reagan. While characterizing the visit as cordial, Arias publicly reasserted his disagreement with Washington over the Nicaraguan insurgency. [ ]

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Costa Rica's two major parties each proposed legislative commissions of inquiry to look into the allegations of San Jose's support for the Nicaraguan insurgents made during the current US congressional investigations. [ ] leaders of both parties subsequently agreed to put off such action to avoid mutual recriminations. [ ]

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Tentative agreement has been reached with the IMF on a \$62 million standby agreement, and San Jose is currently negotiating a \$120 million structural adjustment loan with the World Bank. The stabilization program is to include such measures as spending cuts, currency devaluation, and commercial debt rescheduling. Costa Rica's need to undertake austerity measures to ensure international funding and the burden of its large foreign debt will constrain economic growth over the next year. [ ]

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Issues to Watch

Probable passage of legislation aimed at legalizing small duty-free purchases from Panama may spur public protests and is likely further to strain Arias's relations with his party. The issue pits border-area merchants and lower-income consumers, backed by the Arias administration, against major business interests, the political opposition, and the leading newspapers. Demonstrations and work stoppages have already taken place, and strong sentiments over the issue may fuel further protests following the final vote. [ ]

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PANAMAKey Developments

Defense Chief Noriega forced the resignation of Chief of Staff Diaz on 1 June and named Noriega-loyalist Colonel Justine to the position. The move was aimed at consolidating Noriega's control over the military, allowing him to concentrate on the 1989 presidential election. [REDACTED]

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Diaz's subsequent public allegations of Noriega's involvement in corruption, murder, and electoral fraud sparked several weeks of opposition protests and student clashes with police. The regime imposed a state of emergency after a coalition of business and labor leaders joined forces with the opposition and called for a general strike. The government brought street protests to an end and muzzled the opposition media, and pressure on businesses to remain open helped to undermine the strike after three days. Although hundreds were detained and the police used force on several occasions, there were no confirmed deaths. [REDACTED]

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The government's lifting of the state of emergency led to a resumption of opposition protests but also allowed supporters of the regime to demonstrate--often violently--against alleged US interference in Panama's domestic affairs. [REDACTED]

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Issues to Watch

Anti-Noriega sentiment probably will continue to run high. A new outbreak of protests, particularly if increasingly violent, most likely would lead to the reimposition of the state of emergency and heighten the pressure for President Delvalle to resign. [REDACTED]

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The regime probably will stage a massive rally in support of Noriega on 12 August, the fourth anniversary of his being named Defense Forces Commander. A turnout of fewer than last year's 100,000 could signal a decline in Noriega's popular support. [REDACTED]

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Escalating violence and a perception of waning support for the regime probably would prompt the General Staff to reassess its loyalty to Noriega. The officer corps almost certainly would jettison the Defense Chief if the military's institutional interests were considered at risk. [REDACTED]

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REGIONAL AFFAIRSKey Developments

Several meetings involving the Core Four countries in April failed to narrow differences over the peace plan of Costa Rican President Arias. Honduras and El Salvador, which have criticized different aspects of the plan, were frustrated that San Jose made only minimal changes and intended to present its original draft at the summit originally scheduled for 25-26 June. [ ]

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For its part, Nicaragua made only vague references to its position. A senior Sandinista leader announced in late May that Managua would present its own nine-point plan at the summit, but press reports suggest the plan is only a recapitulation of old proposals. [ ]

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The summit was postponed after Nicaragua--supported by Guatemala--requested that a preparatory meeting of Central American Foreign Ministers be delayed until immediately before the presidential meeting. [ ]

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Salvadoran President Duarte, concerned that the lack of preparation for the summit might allow Nicaragua to outflank the democracies by announcing its acceptance of the Arias plan, gained Core Four acceptance for rescheduling the summit. Managua reluctantly agreed but continued to oppose preparatory meetings unless the Contadora countries also attend. [ ]

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The Contadora mediators have remained relatively inactive, confining themselves to offering their assistance to the summit participants. US Embassy reports indicate that the Contadora countries are unlikely to approve a joint aid program for Managua to alleviate its oil supply difficulties--an idea that some Mexican officials promoted through press leaks in June. [ ]

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Issues to Watch

The Central American democracies are unlikely to reconcile their differences before the summit, now scheduled for 6 August. El Salvador, afraid of being branded an obstacle to peace, probably will be reluctant to suggest another postponement even if no preparatory meeting is held. [ ]

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The Contadora Foreign Ministers probably will meet shortly after the Central American summit to plan their next moves. We believe they will be inclined to maintain a low profile if the Central Americans appear to be making progress, but they may accelerate efforts to mediate in the event of continued impasse. [ ]

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Part II: Feature Articles**Panama: Prospects for Noriega**

The antigovernment demonstrations that began in mid-June have raised questions about the future of Panamanian strongman General Noriega. Former Chief of Staff Roberto Diaz's allegations of involvement by Noriega and the military in corruption, political murder, and electoral fraud set off opposition demonstrations and clashes with police, forcing the regime to declare a state of emergency. Government pressure tactics undercut a general business strike called by the opposition, but the lifting of emergency measures led to a resurgence of opposition protests as well as violent, anti-US demonstrations by supporters of the regime. Noriega's support within the military reportedly remains solid, and the ruling coalition--despite some wavering by President Delvalle and the leftist faction of the dominant Democratic Revolutionary Party--rallied to his defense.

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Noriega's Vulnerabilities

The unexpected strength and persistence of the antigovernment demonstrations have weakened Noriega's political position and probably have doomed his presidential ambitions for 1989. New, more violent demonstrations could cause President Delvalle and other civilian allies of the military to distance themselves from--and in some cases break with--Noriega. Use of the Defense Forces to maintain order would further blacken Noriega's international image and discourage new foreign investment or aid to Panama.

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In our view, the officer corps would be spurred to move against Noriega only if serious, sustained violence and an erosion of popular and international support so damaged the military's standing as to threaten its political dominance. [redacted] view the Defense Forces as their extended family and regard attacks on Noriega as attacks on the military as a whole. [redacted]

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Noriega's Options

**Ride Out the Storm.** According to US Embassy and [redacted] Noriega has no intention of stepping aside. He undoubtedly believes he can rebound politically, as he has in the past, and may even hope to be able to revive his prospects for a presidential bid in the 1990s. We believe his ability to retain control of the military beyond the next elections is strengthened by a General Staff peopled by Noriega allies, such as new Chief of Staff Colonel Justine and Deputy Chief Colonel Purcell, and apolitical professionals, such as Deputy Chief Colonel Castillo. [redacted]

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**Name a New President.** Noriega and the military could try to make Delvalle a scapegoat for failing to control antigovernment demonstrations and force him from office. Despite strong distaste for Vice President Esquivel, who is constitutionally next in line if Delvalle leaves office before October, Noriega

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probably would allow him to become President to avoid further political damage. Since the constitution does not require early elections if both the presidency and vice presidency become vacant within the last two years of a presidential term, we believe Noriega might be tempted to substitute a more malleable interim president after September to boost the prospects for the military's preferred candidate in the 1989 elections. [ ]

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**Stage a Coup.** A direct military takeover of the government would have serious political and international costs for the Defense Forces and is likely only if the military considered it necessary to contain escalating antigovernment violence. A coup probably would alienate the military's civilian allies, cause the ruling coalition to collapse, and place the 1989 elections in doubt. [ ]

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### **If Noriega Stays...**

Noriega's remaining on as Defense Forces commander would, in our view, be seen by many Panamanian groups as a setback for the transition to democracy:

- The political opposition would lose hope of ever wresting control from the military and might be emboldened to advocate more violent protests.
- The business community, which according to Embassy sources is frustrated by the regime's mismanagement of the economy and by Noriega's tolerance of endemic corruption in the military, also would despair of seeing a democratic opening and economic changes that would create a favorable business climate in Panama.
- Even some members of the military-allied Democratic Revolutionary Party who want to see a lessening--not strengthening--of military influence would be alienated. [ ]

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Noriega would be tempted to retaliate against US interests in Panama if he believed Washington were pursuing a policy of attempting to oust him. The regime probably would try to appeal to Panamanian nationalism and boost his popularity by demanding stricter US adherence to the provisions of the 1977 Panama Canal Treaties, restricting access to US bases, and questioning the legality of US military activities in Central America originating from Panama. [ ]

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Nonetheless, Noriega is unlikely to make a dramatic shift in foreign policy. He has been hesitant to strengthen relations with Havana and Moscow, probably for fear that Washington would renege on the Canal treaties. He has demonstrated his willingness to work with US officials since he became chief of intelligence in 1970 and reportedly recognizes the advantages to Panama of remaining under the protective umbrella US forces provide. [ ]

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### **If Noriega Goes...**

[ ] The departure of Noriega would ease tensions and undercut the opposition's ability to mobilize antiregime demonstrations but probably would not portend more democracy in Panama. The military almost certainly intends to remain the final political

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arbiter and would continue to manipulate the political system to ensure the victory of promilitary presidential candidates and to protect its institutional interests. The Defense Forces without Noriega probably would maintain relations with the United States essentially unchanged, although a reversion to the populist, anti-US program of the late strongman Omar Torrijos (1968-1981) remains at least a slight possibility. [REDACTED]

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**Honduras: Will Azcona Last?**

President Azcona's weak performance during the last 16 months has sparked growing criticism from key officers and politicians and generated rumors of a possible coup, according to the US Embassy. The military played a crucial role in keeping the 1985 elections on track and remains reluctant to interfere with the civilian government. Moreover, political rivalries, internal divisions within the armed forces, and the military's desire for continued strong support from the United States probably preclude a forcible ouster of Azcona. Nonetheless, the President's continued refusal to upgrade his Cabinet, coupled with inaction on the economy, could produce concerted pressure from disparate political actors--including the military--and force Azcona's resignation before his term expires in January 1990. [ ]

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Reports about plotting have increased in the wake of Azcona's offhand public remarks in late March that he would not resist a coup. Although dissatisfaction with Azcona has emboldened some military officers and politicians to discuss ousting the President, [ ] we believe they have not agreed on who would be an acceptable alternative or how such a change should occur. Moreover, we doubt the armed forces are ready to back a coup, because they fear the United States would retaliate by cutting off military assistance. [ ]

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Nonetheless, we believe a move to coerce Azcona's resignation cannot be discounted. The President's ability to complete his term, in our view, will be determined by the following interrelated factors. [ ]

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**Leadership Style.** Azcona's stubbornness and perceived lack of administrative ability have raised doubts about his fitness to govern, according to US Embassy reporting. He has resisted pressure to shake up the Cabinet--which is widely vilified as a collection of inept and corrupt officials whose chief qualification is their political ties to the President--and has been unable to control members of his own party and government. Vice President Rosenthal and President of the Congress Montoya, for example, have made numerous statements challenging the integrity of the administration and its foreign policies. Showing its dissatisfaction with Azcona's performance, the opposition National Party has stopped cooperating on some domestic issues and is threatening to pursue an independent foreign policy, according to the US Embassy. [ ]

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**Economic Problems.** Public criticism of Azcona's government has intensified as concerns about the stagnating economy mount. Large infusions of US financial aid notwithstanding, economic growth is lagging behind a rapidly growing population and, according to recent opinion polls, unemployment remains the major concern of most Hondurans. In April of this year, the third largest US investment in Honduras--the Rosario Mining Corporation--closed its operations, adversely affecting the livelihood of more than 24,000 people. Despite the unease about the economy, however, we see no indication that labor or business is prepared to organize public protests and pressure the government to institute new policies. [ ]

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**Military Support.** While deferring to the armed forces on national security issues and refusing to interfere with internal military affairs, Azcona stubbornly refuses to accommodate the Army on issues such as removing government officials--the Education Minister, for example--who are either weak administrators or linked to subversive groups. Mounting political opposition to the President would give the military more leverage in demanding Cabinet and policy changes, but pervasive strife among officer cliques, in our view, will hamper efforts to mount a serious challenge to Azcona. Moreover, the armed forces probably view him as more malleable than those civilians in the constitutional line of succession. [REDACTED]

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**US Support.**

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[REDACTED] we believe Azcona--who has been an outspoken advocate for supporting US policy--has relied on his close ties with Washington to offset his weak political base at home. [REDACTED] however, that many Honduran officials doubt the long-term commitment of the United States, and some believe Azcona has not secured adequate assurances of Washington's support in exchange for Tegucigalpa's cooperation. [REDACTED]

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**Outlook**

We believe Azcona will complete his term in office if he is able to assert some degree of authority as President and retains the strong support of the United States. Failure to demonstrate strong leadership and deal with pressing domestic matters could prompt senior political and military officials to seek his resignation, and a substantial reduction of US aid would remove the major impediment to such action. Azcona might decide unilaterally to quit out of personal frustration over his inability to quiet strife within his ruling party or to implement economic reforms. In the event of resignation, the constitution stipulates the legislature must select a successor from one of three Vice Presidential designates or the President of the Congress. In our view, Vice President Rosenthal and President of the Congress Montoya would be the most likely candidates to replace Azcona. [REDACTED]

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We believe an outright coup is unlikely during the next 18 months. Nonetheless, if factional strife among officers is resolved and the military hierarchy is faced with a united front of business and political leaders clamoring for intervention, the Army might feel compelled to depose Azcona, despite the risk of damaging relations with Washington. [REDACTED]

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**El Salvador-Nicaragua: Increased Emphasis on Mine Warfare**

The use of mines in the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan insurgencies varies greatly, with the Salvadoran guerrillas and--to a much lesser extent--the Sandinista military employing the most mines. Mine warfare, particularly as practiced by the Salvadoran guerrillas, has proven to be an inexpensive and deadly weapon against large-scale government counterinsurgency operations. Faced with a deteriorating military situation, the Salvadoran rebels expanded mine warfare two years ago and are likely to continue to rely on it despite heavy civilian casualties. Countermeasures implemented by the Salvadoran military have failed, and losses have been increasing. [REDACTED]

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Although mine warfare probably has extended the life and increased the destructive capability of the Salvadoran insurgency, it has had little impact on the insurgency in Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan military, unlike its Salvadoran counterpart, uses mines extensively--in both Honduran and Nicaraguan territory--but has inflicted relatively few casualties. Anti-Sandinista guerrillas rarely use mines but have a large stockpile and increasingly may use them as the war's pace increases. [REDACTED]

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**Guerrilla and Government Use in El Salvador**

The Salvadoran guerrillas turned to mines in 1985 in response to the improved counterinsurgency capabilities of the Salvadoran armed forces. These weapons have been used as a relatively cheap, low-risk way to inflict heavy casualties. [REDACTED] that command-detonated mines--which require an operator to be present to activate the detonating mechanism--are frequently used in ambushes of government patrols and vehicles, and pressure-detonated mines are emplaced around guerrilla encampments to impede government attacks. When retreating, the guerrillas often place mines to kill or maim pursuing soldiers. [REDACTED]

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Mine warfare by the Salvadoran guerrillas has become an increasingly destructive tactic. [REDACTED] mines accounted for nearly two thirds of all military casualties in 1986--1,753 out of 2,846--compared to about one third in 1985 and less than 3 percent in 1984. In addition, rebel mines, often placed indiscriminately, killed at least 45 civilians and wounded 162 in 1986, according to US Embassy statistics. The Salvadoran Army, on the other hand, employs mines sparingly and avoids use of unrecoverable devices; its mines accounted for only one known civilian death in 1986, according to Embassy reporting. [REDACTED]

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Government countermeasures have had only limited success. The Army received some 400 mine detectors in May 1986, but the guerrillas were able to negate them by constructing smaller devices, reducing the number of metal components, or burying the mines deeper, [REDACTED] The Army has discovered that small-unit tactics and irregular routes of advance make the troops less vulnerable to the mines, but adherence to these practices varies from unit to unit. [REDACTED]

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The government has turned the guerrillas' indiscriminate use of mines against them in a fairly successful propaganda campaign depicting civilian victims. The international press has publicized the situation, and the Catholic Church and some human rights organizations have condemned the rebels. [REDACTED]

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### Guerrilla and Government Use in Nicaragua

Mines are used more infrequently in Nicaragua than in El Salvador. The guerrillas do not have semipermanent camps to defend with mines as the Salvadoran rebels do, are not as adept with mines as their Salvadoran counterparts, and do not appear willing to risk the international condemnation that would take place if civilian casualties resulted. The Sandinistas, like the Salvadoran Army, use mines for static defense but also emplace them along the Honduran border to slow rebel infiltration. Both sides appear intent on expanding mine use. [REDACTED]

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The Sandinistas began to mine areas along the Honduran border--and to a much lesser extent the Costa Rican border--in 1983 to block rebel movement to and from their base camps and possibly to discourage the flight of military deserters and private citizens. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] that at least six Hondurans, including one civilian, were killed or wounded by Sandinista mines left in the Las Vegas salient after the Nicaraguan incursion last December. Honduran minesweeping teams have discovered more than 300 mines so far and continue to find new ones, suggesting that Sandinista reconnaissance patrols are still mining the salient. A defector reports that a small stretch of the border remains unmined to allow Sandinista patrols to enter and exit Honduras safely. Nearly all of the mines are Soviet- or Czech-manufactured, pressure sensitive devices--not command-controlled. [REDACTED]

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While the mines occasionally have slowed rebel infiltration--the insurgents must evade known minefields, and movement stops when a mine is detonated--few casualties apparently have resulted. [REDACTED]

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In response to heightened guerrilla activity inside Nicaragua, the Sandinistas may be increasing their use of mines. [REDACTED]

25X1  
25X1

[REDACTED] the Nicaraguan military has mined areas around many bridges and electrical and telephone poles to deter insurgent sabotage. The Sandinistas also appear to be using mines in ambushes of rebel units. [REDACTED]

25X1

The use of mines by the Nicaraguan Resistance Army/North--formerly the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN)--has been limited but is likely to increase soon. [REDACTED]

25X1

[REDACTED] Although mines were used against Sandinistas attacking insurgent units at San Andres de Bocay in May, insurgent leaders claimed last fall that they do not place mines around their camps in Honduras.

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25X1

The mines probably are used almost exclusively against government vehicles and patrols inside Nicaragua. [REDACTED]

25X1

The rebels, who deny using pressure-sensitive antitank mines indiscriminately, officially prohibit their use in populated areas. In comparison to the Salvadoran guerrillas, there have been relatively few charges made against the Nicaraguan insurgents for killing civilians with mines. One exception occurred in July 1986, when the rebels were blamed by international human rights groups for the deaths of 32 peasants whose vehicle was destroyed by an antitank mine. In late January of this year, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] that civilian losses are higher than the military's but provided no statistics. [REDACTED]

25X1

#### Outlook: Mining to Increase

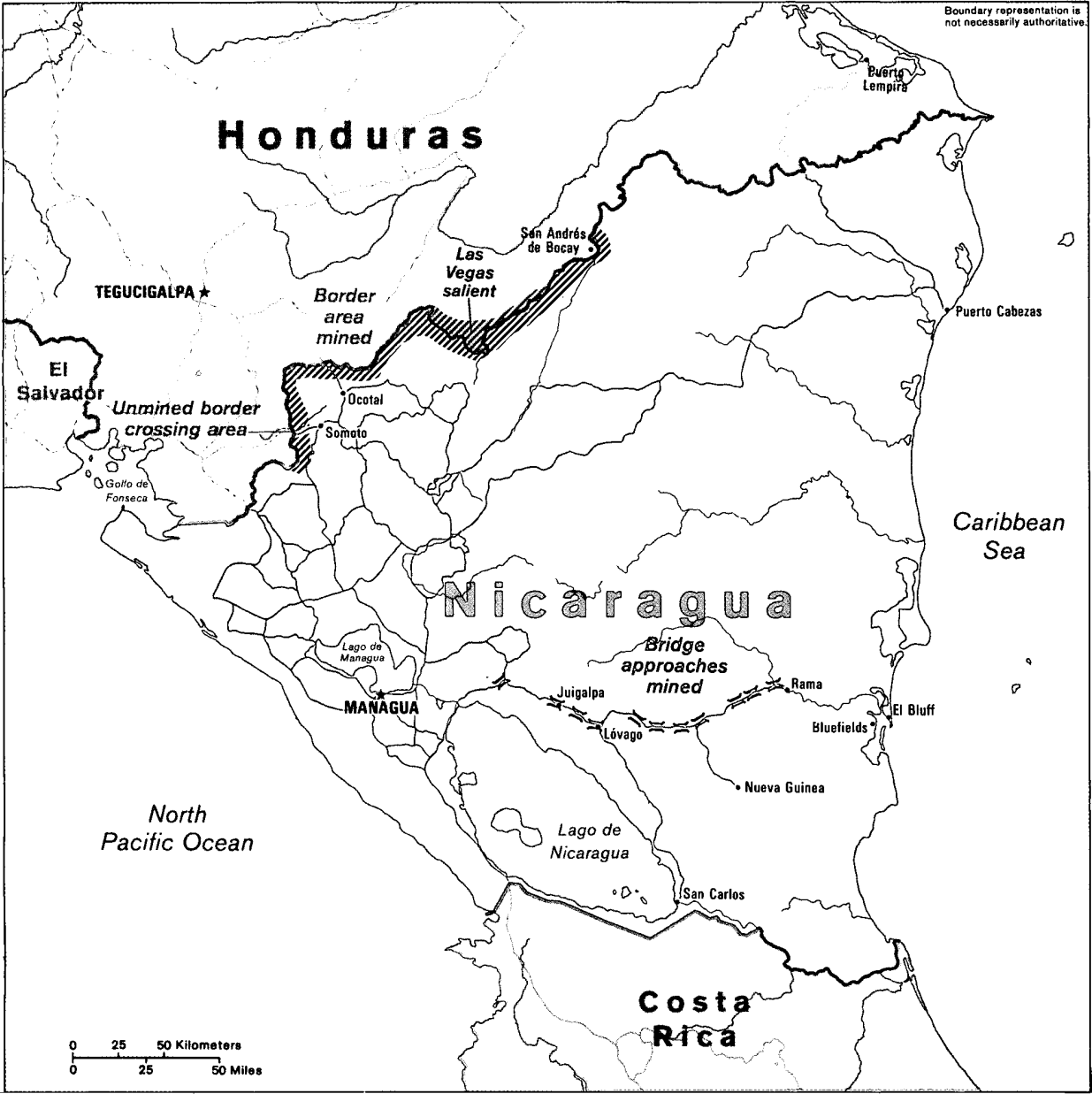
We believe mine warfare will become more widespread in Nicaragua in the next few months and continue at its current pace in El Salvador. The Nicaraguan rebels most likely will use more of their large supply of mines because mine-activated ambushes can inflict more casualties with less risk than conventional ambushes. Moreover, the establishment of command posts in Nicaragua may require the use of minefields as a defensive measure. Because of manpower constraints, the Sandinistas may increasingly depend on mines for the defense of economic facilities targeted by the insurgents. [REDACTED]

25X1

With their military situation still tenuous, the Salvadoran guerrillas probably will continue the large-scale use of mines--their most effective weapon. The insurgents recently proposed to halt mine warfare if the Army ceased artillery and aerial bombing, but the declaration appeared to have been made only to score propaganda points since the insurgents knew the Army was unwilling to sacrifice its firepower advantage. Civilian and government casualties are likely to remain heavy. [REDACTED]

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Areas Reportedly Mined by Sandinistas



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